

VOLUNTEER FAIRS

TIPS FOR NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

Contact: Lucy Schaich, 349-3433 or volunteer@bloomington.in.gov

From the perspective of a potential volunteer, a volunteer fair is a great way to become familiar with different organizations, and to explore opportunities by talking with representatives in a casual atmosphere. From a Volunteer Coordinator's perspective, recruiting new volunteers through a Volunteer Fair is one approach to an ongoing challenge that must be worked on continuously and in a variety of ways in order for a program to remain viable and sustainable.

Prior to the fair:

- **Decide what you're recruiting for.** Many people like to start out by volunteering for a special event. If the timing is right, recruit for that event, while offering specific information about the range of volunteer opportunities in your organization.
- **Prepare a sign-up sheet.** Have a sign-up sheet ready for those wanting additional information and/or for those wanting to register for a particular event.
- **Prepare materials.** While your primary focus is recruiting new volunteers, remember that you are engaging in outreach, education and public relations for your organization as a whole. You are also networking and possibly promoting goodwill and forging alliances with other nonprofit organizations. Have materials on hand that will help you respond to questions or comments and a notebook where booth staff, or the public, can write messages and questions that are then taken back to the organization.
- **Decide who will work the display booth.** Choose people who are enthusiastic and who will maximize this opportunity for your organization. Members of the Board of Directors and other satisfied volunteers often make the best recruiters. Make sure they know what time to be there, what to wear (if applicable), and where to park. Provide them with a nametag with their names and your organization's name, and ask them to wear it. Remind them of extras they might want (sunscreen, umbrella, jacket, bottled water).

- **Train and orient booth staff.** Train the people who will staff your booth. Familiarize them with the materials you are presenting to the public. Help them to realize their limits -- what questions they can and cannot answer -- and what to do about those they cannot answer. Inform them of your organization's biggest barriers to recruiting volunteers, the client population of your organization (if applicable), and the nature of the people who are attending the volunteer fair (e.g., high school or college students, people that shop in a particular location) and their demographics. Ask them to count the number of people with whom they interact, at a minimum. You may want additional information as well.
- **Plan your display.** When planning your display, think vertical if your display is inside and prepare to go horizontal if it is outside, due to wind. Bring weights or bungee cords for your materials. Use photos of previous volunteers and events. Consider using inexpensive items or candy for giveaways.

When you're waiting for someone to express an interest in your organization:

- Look interested and interesting. Don't let your body language say that you are bored or tired.
- Make eye contact with passers-by.
- Don't read a book -- they won't interrupt you.
- Stop talking with others when someone approaches -- they won't interrupt you.

When someone expresses interest in your organization:

- Make eye contact. Smile. Be polite and friendly.
- Initiate a conversation.
- Ask them if they are familiar with your organization and its volunteer positions.
- Ask them if they would like to sign up on your sheet.

It is also important to:

- Visit the other displays. If you are the only one there from your organization, ask someone from a neighboring booth to booth-sit for you so you don't miss important opportunities.
- Stay for the duration of the fair.
- Be ready if someone wants to volunteer! That's why you're there!

